

AIDS: how Bush and Dukakis stand on the issues

BY KATHY KNOWLES

Analyzing the presidential candidates' positions on AIDS reveals significant differences. It is important to see these differences in order to make an informed choice on Election Day in November; who we elect will have an impact on education, research, counseling and testing, treatment and services for those at risk and who are already infected with HIV.

The most obvious differences between Bush and Dukakis are shown by the content of their position papers. In *Mike Dukakis on the Issues: War on AIDS*, Dukakis has outlined and identified the important elements to deal effectively with AIDS and HIV infection and has drawn upon his past experience when as governor of Massachusetts he led the fight early in the epidemic. He has identified a "National Battle Plan Against AIDS," which includes sections on Education, Counseling and Testing, IV Drug Users, Research and Public Health, International Epidemic, and finally, Meeting the Challenge.

In each section he discusses the relevant issues and has practical strategy in mind, which he has already tested in Massachusetts. Particularly refreshing is the education plan, which emphasizes the need to "teach everyone about the dangers of AIDS and provide them information to protect themselves from infection." Dukakis is aware of the elements that compose a comprehensive AIDS plan and pledges to improve what we have now and to increase resources to carry out this plan. Dukakis is personally willing to lead this campaign as president.

Dukakis sees the value of funds for research projects, which may yield additional treatments, a vaccine and ultimately a cure. He also supports the Kennedy/Waxman bill and sees the need to increase funding for AIDS research.

He is committed to a compassionate response for people with AIDS and to developing innovative mechanisms to finance healthcare for those infected. Dukakis is willing to support a national healthcare plan to provide adequate

Political stew

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healthcare for all Americans and to ensure that people with AIDS have access as well to needed care. In the same vein, he sees the need to encourage more "cost effective ways of caring for people, especially home and hospice care."

The Counseling and Testing section outlines plans to devote more resources to voluntary counseling and testing. Dukakis sees the need for safe testing sites. He will support federal anti-discrimination and confidentiality legislation with monetary penalties for those who violate confidentiality. Such laws already exist for drug treatment personnel, but not for those working with AIDS.

Dukakis supports more treatment slots for IV drug users. He does not address needle-exchange programs, which have been in operation in Europe and have been successful in slowing the spread of HIV in that population.

Dukakis points out that the AIDS epidemic has revealed serious flaws in this country's system of medical research and administration of public-health services. He asserts that the current administration has been slow to respond, but in fact the Centers for Disease Control have launched a series of seroprevalence studies that will help to direct research and educational programs. He supports increasing resources for the scientific and medi-

cal communities, as well as fast-tracking basic research programs, grant reviews and drug evaluations.

Dukakis pledges to work on an international scale and will "mobilize international resources in support of a global anti-AIDS campaign."

Dukakis is willing to meet the challenge of AIDS by providing strategy, resources and personal leadership.

Bush's position on AIDS presents a different picture. His paper lists one accomplishment relevant to AIDS during his tenure as vice president: chairing the President's Task Force on Regulatory Relief, which worked with the FDA to fast-track the availability of experimental treatments for people with AIDS. He points out that this country has spent \$766 million in 1987, with plans to spend "close to \$1 billion this year," and that probably the government will need to spend more funds as the 1990s approach.

He supports education, but only outlines sketchy plans for students. In fact, Bush appears to be appealing to parents with a brief section identifying concerns they might have if a child who was infected with HIV was to be in school with their child. There is no mention of other populations that need to be educated, such as IV drug users.

He supports research and testing, but with no concrete plan. On the testing issue he admits having difficulty with privacy versus the "need for more information." He recommends encouraging states to offer "routine testing" for those who seek marriage licenses, who visit STD and drug-abuse clinics, and who are prison inmates. One wonders if he realizes the enormous costs of all these testing programs.

He mentions briefly the need for confidentiality and anti-discrimination protections for persons undergoing testing, but there is no mention of assigning monetary penalties for those who break confidentiality and no substantial plan of action.

Last week, at the National Leadership Coalition on AIDS conference for business leaders Stephen E. Herbits, executive vice president for Joseph E. Seagram and Sons Inc., stated, "The simple truth is that the president has a moral and probably constitutional imperative to trigger America's best defense from this plague. He has failed." Dr. Theodore Cooper, chief executive officer of Upjohn Co., also stated at the same conference, "There is no leadership thrust in the government as a whole to coordinate AIDS research developments and public policy proposals." It was noted at the conference that Dukakis quickly endorsed the Presidential Commission on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus Epidemic report and that Bush subsequently supported the call for federal anti-discrimination legislation.

Bush's statement is one and a half pages long, but shows little strategy and little experience. Where has he been all these years? The epidemic has raged on, yet he has provided only minimal leadership.

Dukakis's *War on AIDS* is three pages long and shows concern, strategy and experience. He is willing to trigger America's best defense from AIDS in a humane and compassionate manner. Dukakis is not afraid to step forward and provide the leadership so desperately needed at this time. He has been actively involved in AIDS issues since 1983, making them a priority for his administration in Massachusetts, while Bush has followed Reagan's example of doing as little as possible for people affected by AIDS and HIV infection. This country can't afford four more years of inaction.

Kathy Knowles is director of the Health Information Network of Seattle. This article appeared previously in the Seattle Gay News.

Gays should work both sides of the fence

Because the gay community encompasses people from all walks of life, all economic ranks and all political philosophies, it could become a swing vote that wields power much more effectively

BY DELL RICHARDS

Gay Republican Frank Ricchiazzi remembers his roots — a section of Buffalo, New York, where almost everyone was named Ricchiazzi or Giannelli.

"I always thought that Smith and Jones were foreigners who just came over," he joked.

Ricchiazzi said the lessons he learned as an Italian-American come in handy as a gay political strategy.

"In New York state, one of the largest voting blocks is Italian-American," he said. "Forty-seven percent of all Italian-Americans register Republican and 45 percent register Democratic."

"How they usually do it is the husband registers one party and the wife registers the other.

"Look at what we have in New York today," said Ricchiazzi. "We have a governor who's a Democrat whose name is Mario Cuomo." Many other state officials also have Italian roots.

According to Ricchiazzi, Italian-Americans became a swing vote — giving no allegiance to any one party but throwing their combined power to Italian candidates — because they couldn't relate to either party.

"When they looked at the Republican party, they saw Protestants, Yankees — and they couldn't relate to them," said Ricchiazzi.

"On the Democratic side, they saw Irish Catholics, blacks and Jewish people — and they couldn't relate to them."

Because the gay community encompasses people from all walks of life, all economic ranks and all political philosophies, Ricchiazzi

thinks that it too could become a swing vote that wields power much more effectively.

Ricchiazzi isn't the only politico who questions the usual identification of the gay community with liberalism. Even some Democrats are beginning to rethink the alliance.

The central committee chair of the Democratic party of Sacramento County, California, school board member Gary Miller, thinks that the Democrats should deliver more when gays work for Democratic causes.

"As chair of the party, my role is to be a unifier, to support the party and to encourage everybody to vote Democratic," said Miller.

"But as a gay person, I find it a conflict because the party hasn't been as supportive as it should be of our concerns.

"I see not only myself but other gay people throughout the state who have put in time and money to the Democratic party supporting candidates that are perhaps not all that supportive of our issues, but for the sake of the party, we've been there," continued Miller.

"Then when we go back to party officials and say, 'OK, now, it's our turn. We want to put up our candidates. And we want you to support them.' But they're not there.

"I don't know whether we should turn off the faucet of money to the Democratic party — or what alternatives there are.

"We've done so much for the party, but we're not getting enough back."

No matter what the party registration, Ricchiazzi feels that only by working both sides of the political fence can gays achieve their goals.

He points to the California Assembly bill that would have prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual preference.

Introduced annually by former San Francisco Assemblyman Art Agnos, the measure barely got out of the Assembly, which was controlled by Democrats.

"What you had was a very heavy steel ball on the floor — and that ball was the Agnos bill," said Ricchiazzi.

"For seven years, gay Democrats wanted to pick up that ball only with their left hand — and they couldn't do it.

"When the Republicans in the gay community came aboard and we used both the left hand and the right hand, how easy it was to pick it up."

Even though Republican Gov. George Deukmejian vetoed the measure, that defeat doesn't change Ricchiazzi's basic claim.

When it comes to gay issues, "We should be helping each other," said Ricchiazzi.

"We're all trying to do the same thing."

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